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President's Notes: Challenge!

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CHALLENGE!

Historically the U.S. Navy--indeed, every branch of the Armed Forces--has lived in the cloister of isolation, protected from and uninvolved, for the most part, with the outside world of politics and the complexities of international affairs. The proud, proper, self-imposed traditions and code of the American professional fighting man have held the Armed Forces outside of political involvement and aloof from public controversy.

Now all this is changing. The military find themselves more and more--often involuntarily--drawn into the drama of world events "on stage," rather than as proficient military technicians in the service of the Nation.

It is the direct result of the revolutionary advance in communications--instantaneous communications.

It once was, with some historical exceptions that only Government leaders and diplomats were the spokesmen on matters affecting foreign policy. Today the commanding officer of a Marine regiment in Southeast Asia or of a 6th Fleet carrier in the Mediterranean is not even afforded the luxury of time for restatement or reconsideration before his most casual opinions are broadcast to the world. This evolution has occurred not from any new assumption of power by the military but principally because journalism and the television media have moved on a large scale from the police court to the world beat. They have the remarkable ability to make instantaneous and worldwide transmissions, not only of words but of visual events.

With this advance has come a form of news projection that attempts in 90 seconds to explain the fantastic complexities of modern war and diplomacy. It is at best an almost impossible task; yet the military cannot afford to ignore the weight and influence of this form of "public diplomacy."

Thus, the constant presence of public information in the spectrum of command has an inevitable effect on policy and planning for the command. For to ignore or neglect instant communications is to overlook one of the chief factors in the effects of policy and planning. The article by Captain Amme in this issue clearly demonstrates the need to predict relevant social parameters if long-range strategy is to be successful.

How, then, is the modern naval officer to deal most advantageously with this situation? It is no startling revelation to concede that the present situation is less than satisfactory. Public confidence in the excellence, the competence--in some cases, even the integrity--of the military is under scrutiny. The focus of public attention on the military, brought about by three wars in a generation and the unpopularity of the latest one, has instigated a questioning of how much voice the military has or ought to have in a democratic society.

One answer to this problem, advocated recently in some circles, is a reversion to the position of the military in the latter part of the last century. The way to extricate ourselves from the tangled mesh of public criticism and interference, this argument goes, is to withdraw to the "military professionalism" of the past. The reason for the adverse direction that public evaluation of the Armed Forces has taken, it is suggested, is due to an overextension of the sphere of subjects to which we address ourselves. This line of reasoning holds that whenever the naval officer advises his civilian superiors on the formulation of foreign or politico-military policy, he exposes himself to a derogation of his position as a military professional. It is said that the Navy has a responsibility to its client, society, to foster and promote officers whose scope of competence is exclusively military. And whenever the Navy makes an effort to expand its expertise into those matters which touch upon economics, foreign policy, and other interests not within the strict province of the military scientist, the result is to dilute and weaken this client relationship. The naval service should retire, it is recommended, to its traditional cloisters and cease to trespass beyond the pale of assigned tactical and strategic considerations. Only then, when it has ensconced itself behind the sheltering walls of a limited body of military knowledge, will the Navy be protected from the scathing incursions of open journalism and frequent public attention.

On its surface, this argument is not unattractive. It would be comforting to believe that the answer to the challenge of the communications revolution is to abdicate from its implications.

It is true that Mahan was probably more instrumental than anyone else in the establishment of a distinct body of knowledge for the military profession--an individual discipline, as it might be called today. But the profound effect his writings had, for decades, on the foreign policy not only of the United States but of other nations, bears witness, to the breadth and diversity of his understanding. This interrelation between military affairs and foreign policy is even more valid, more demonstrable, and more immediately important now, exactly because of the technological innovations with which we are currently faced. Mr. Robinson's lecture, for example, reproduced in this issue, examines the mechanics of the constant interaction of the various spheres of society in the United States today.

The inquiring focus of journalistic concern with the actions and statements of individual military commanders will not disappear, or even relax, simply because those commanders advert their attention from the broader nonmilitary aspects of their missions. Those aspects must of necessity persist, and with them will remain the demand for public examination.

We in uniform face today a novel and basic challenge: the challenge of excellence and intergrity in an environment almost daily altered by the lightning progress of human ingenuity and technological change. Are we to meet this challenge by default, by imposing limitations on our thinking? Our client is society, to whom we provide a service of unique importance. But, confronted with these new demands, surely we best serve our client by an expansion, not a contraction. of our competence. Just as the United States since 1945 has shouldered an enlarged responsibility commensurate with a larger role in world affairs, and just as this country cannot avoid its widened responsibility by a return to the isolationism of the thirties, likewise the trend of recent events requires of the military an expansion of its professional expertise.

If there has lately been a rising tide of adverse criticism of the armed services--if the thrust of the criticism has been directed toward the handling of

issues which emanate from the non-military as well as military implications of service activities--and if the vehicle of this criticism has been open journalism, then the answer is indeed that the concept of military professionalism should change. It must include an understanding of open journalism and the public interest in all facets of military affairs. We ourselves must learn to be practitioners of open journalism, providing a comprehensive, candid, and sensitive explanation of our role, duties and responsibilities to a modern society.

The civilian and military relationship of mutual respect and understanding must always be the great strength of our democratic society. In this sense alone, an interchange should be continued and fostered between the civilian and military, and the constitutional principle of civilian control of the military thus strengthened and made more viable.

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